

# Preface

There is a marked dearth in the English language of translations of classical *tafsīr* literature and the overriding intention of the translators in undertaking this abridged translation of *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (The Comprehensive Legal Rulings of the Qur'ān) by Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) has been to give access to English speaking readers of the Qur'ān to one of the great classical commentaries of the Qur'ān and to the enormous wealth of traditional understanding of the Qur'ānic *āyats* which it contains.

The explanation of the meaning of Allah's words to mankind in His final Revelation requires many different facets to be taken into consideration – linguistic, spiritual, historical, legal, etc. – and the great commentators, while, of course, covering all of these aspects in general, tended to concentrate on one in particular. As his title makes clear, the special interest of al-Qurṭubī was legal, and his commentary looks in depth at all the legal implications contained in the *āyats* of the Qur'ān. Elucidation of this aspect of the Revelation is, of course, essential to understanding those passages with direct legal significance, as well as providing an extremely illuminating insight to other *āyats* whose legal import is not immediately obvious, and the approach also shows vividly how the Qur'ān impinges on and should be applied to our daily lives.

However, in his desire to clarify the details of every legal judgement which can be extrapolated from the Qur'ānic *āyats*, the author tends to digress into the examination of every possible branch of the matter concerned in a way that goes considerably beyond what is necessary for the complete understanding of the *āyat* under discussion. After than simply concentrating on the particular legal ruling derived from the *āyat*, he will provide a detailed explanation of the entire fiqh of the area concerned, including all

the differing opinions of different fuqahā', and the weight of their respective arguments. Since the primary object of presenting this work was to provide a tool to enable English speakers to gain a greater understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān rather than to produce a manual of Islamic law of which there are many available, in their abridgement the translators have cut out the passages which go into extraneous legal detail, aiming to leave only that legal material which serves to really contribute to the understanding of the *āyat* in question. This is one of the ways in which the original work has been abridged.

Further abridgement has taken place through the omission of numerous grammatical and philological points which only relate to the original Arabic and have no bearing when the meaning has been transposed into English.

There are several occasions when a *ḥadīth*, which the author has quoted to assist in the explanation a particular *āyat*, has been followed by other versions of the same *ḥadīth*, often only differing one from the other in the smallest of details. In these instances usually only the first version has been included. The *isnāds* of the *aḥādīth* have also been curtailed to avoid excessive lists of names, as have discussions about the comparative strengths of the different *isnāds* when that has no bearing on the eventual use of the *ḥadīth* involved. Certain other *aḥādīth* have been omitted when they are quoted to demonstrate the linguistic use of a certain word, rather than the subject of the *āyat* itself.

Another thing which has been cut out is several poems which were included in the original, together with the complex discussion on the linguistic usages involved in them, whose translation does not add to the general understanding of the *āyats* when translated into English.

One other point worth mentioning is that both the Arabic text of the Qur'ān used and also the English rendering of the *āyats*, which throughout is from the Noble Qur'ān published by Bookwork and is also the work of the present translators, employ the Warsh reading, which is doubly appropriate in this instance since it was undoubtedly the reading which al-Qurṭubī originally

studied and the one which was most widespread in the area in which this famous work was originally published. This means that readers may notice a few slight differences between this and other versions with which they may be familiar. It also means that the *āyat* numbering will not be exactly the same as that used in texts and translations based on the Ḥafṣ reading. It should be noted in this regard that there is, in fact, no particular numbering of the *āyats* which absolutely definitive, and even varies in different printings of the Warsh version, as readers will discover when they read al-Qurṭubī's introduction.

Anyone not familiar with Warsh may wonder about the heavy black dots inserted under or over some letters in the Arabic text. These are used to indicate various points of pronunciation depending on where they are situated. Some mark an *imāla* which means that the pronunciation of the vowel concerned is narrowed and not so open as it would otherwise be. At other times it marks where the hamza would be if the reciter were beginning with word concerned rather than eliding it with the word before. The point is that the unfamiliar reader should realise that this is the normal way in which the Warsh text is written and not an aberration of some kind.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate that this translation never set out to be a work of dry scholarship, intended to give an exact and literal translation of the original text, but rather is intended to give modern readers access to the immense learning of Imām al-Qurṭubī in such a way that it will illuminate for them the meaning of Allah's words in the Qur'ān and open to them through his wisdom depths of understanding which have not previously been open to them.

We ask Allah to accept this from us and to forgive its many shortcomings and to make it a means to the greater understanding of His Noble Book.

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